

MINNEAPOLIS and ST. PAUL, Minn. -- At a time when Minnesota is faced with the state's first measles outbreak in years, national and state vaccination experts came together on the St. Paul campus of Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota this morning to discuss how to improve vaccination rates and keep Minnesota children safe from vaccine-preventable disease.

Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota, in partnership with U.S. Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04), hosted the Minnesota Vaccination Awareness Forum. The theme of today's forum was "Our Community, Our Children, Our Responsibility: Vaccinate." The event was moderated by Patsy Stinchfield, CPNP, Children's director of infectious disease.

The goal of the forum was to kick-off a statewide call to action to rally parents, providers and communities around the critical importance of vaccination in protecting public health. A panel of speakers representing Minnesota families and national, state, non-profit and private health organizations provided their insight on vaccinations trends and presented their thoughts on how to improve rates.

Speakers and panelists at today's event included:

\* The Honorable Betty McCollum, U.S. congresswoman (MN-04)

\* Martin G. Myers, MD, emeritus professor, University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston; director, National Network for Immunization Information

\* Edward Ehlinger, MD, MSPH, commissioner, Minnesota Department of Health

\* Robert Jacobson, MD, pediatrician, Mayo Clinic; chair of AAP Immunization Task Force, Minnesota Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics

\* Brendalee Flint & Hodan Hassan, Minnesota mothers and vaccination advocates

Although Minnesota has long been a leader in childhood vaccination, in recent years the rates for a number of vaccinations have become stagnant, placing Minnesota children at risk for vaccine-preventable disease.

A report by Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota last month outlined the state's rates and called for convening state leaders to further the dialogue and map out ways to improve immunization rates. The full report can be found at [www.childrensmn.org/checkups](http://www.childrensmn.org/checkups).

In front of an audience at today's event that included state leaders in health care, policy and education, Congresswoman McCollum asked that all Minnesotans unite to promote on-time vaccinations, and challenged participants to increase Minnesota's rates to be among the highest in the nation. "Getting children vaccinated literally saves lives, including children in Minnesota," said Congresswoman McCollum. "Today's event demonstrates that the health care community is committed to educating parents about the importance of immunizations. Public health officials and policymakers have a responsibility to dispel myths and misinformation that put children and our public health system at risk."

Other speakers discussed how science, health care practices and economics all support vaccinating children. They also presented on the importance of separating the myths from the facts about vaccinations – a message that is especially timely in light of the 21 cases of measles that have been reported in the state since March.

"Our state has always been a leader in children's health. But one danger of success is complacency," said Stinchfield. "The recent outbreak of measles and resulting hospitalizations are of great concern. We were glad to see so many people at today's forum willing to commit to meaningful action that will help ensure every child in Minnesota is protected from these preventable diseases."

To raise additional awareness to the subject of immunizations, Gov. Mark Dayton has proclaimed the week of April 24 Minnesota Vaccine Awareness Week.

## About Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota

Serving as Minnesota's children's hospital since 1924, Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota is one of the largest pediatric health care organization in the United States, with 340 staffed beds at its two hospitals in St. Paul and Minneapolis. An independent, not-for-profit health care system, Children's of Minnesota provides care through more than 12,000 inpatient visits and more than 200,000 emergency room and other outpatient visits every year. Children's is the only Minnesota hospital system to provide comprehensive care exclusively to children.

Children's is regularly ranked among the top pediatric hospitals in the nation by U.S. News & World Report, most recently in 2010 for its neonatal care. Once again in 2010, Children's was recognized by the Leapfrog Group as one of the seven top hospitals in the country for quality and efficiency. In addition, the American Nurses Credentialing Center has named Children's a Magnet hospital, a designation that recognizes excellence in nursing.